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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## LACQUER AND VERNIS MARTIN.

BY  
THEODORE CHILD.



ASSOCIATED with the ornaments of Boule, lacquer is first employed in the decoration of furniture under Louis XIV., it achieves vogue under Louis XV., and becomes a craze under Louis XVI. In the beginning, when the Chinese and Japanese first sent their lacquers the French *ébénistes*

simply broke up Oriental cabinets, boxes and screens, in order to obtain panels of subjects or of landscapes in gold relief on black ground, which they inserted in their furniture. Soon, however, as the fashion continued, and as the system of breaking up was unsatisfactory and inconvenient,

they simply sent their wood to the Oriental workshops and had it lacquered on the spot. But this system was naturally very expensive and very slow, and so attempts were made to discover a means of replacing the Oriental lac by some analogous composition.

The first of these inventors was a Dutchman Huygens, whose work is unknown to us, and must have become confounded with the second-rate vernis that we now despise. After Huygens comes Martin, or rather the Martins, for they were a whole family. M. Louis Courajod has discovered several facts relating to this family. Before 1748 the fame of the Martins was already made and their establishment honored with the title of Manufacture Royale. A decree of 19 February, 1744, gave Simon Etienne Martin the right, exclusively of all others, to manufacture during a period of twenty years all kinds of objects in relief and in the Japanese and Chinese taste, and these imitations were so admirably executed that it is only by details in the costume of the figures and in the foliage that we can distinguish them from Oriental lacquer.

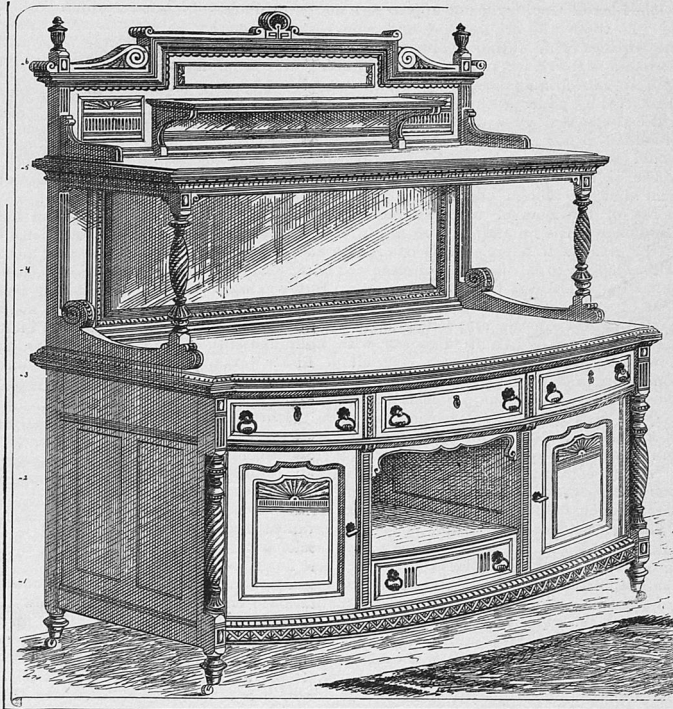
It must be added that it is only lately that we have really begun to study the history of French furniture, and if Robert Martin was the cleverest and the best known of the workers in *verniss*, he must have had many predecessors as he had many successors, for the inventories of the reign of Louis XIV. mention such a great quantity of furniture of European make and varnished like Oriental lacquer, that it is impossible to suppose that all these pieces had been sent to China or Japan to be lacquered. Several names, too, have recently been found of workers in vernis. Mne. la Vicountesse de Jazé has a clavecin signed Pascal Taskin. A Louis XV. commode, gold design on black ground imitating lacquer, exhibited at the Union Centrale in 1882, is signed Burb. A similar commode in the Jones collection at South Kensington is signed Joseph. In the palace of Fontainebleau are several commodes, the form and brass ornaments of which are far superior to the execution of the panels in imitation lac.

M. Courajod tells us that Madame de Pompadour esteemed highly the Vernis-Martin and admitted it into her dwellings. One of the Martins was employed by the Dauphin at Versailles from 1749 to 1756 to decorate his apartments. In 1749 this Martin is paid 6,459 livres 5 sols 2 deniers for work done in the cabinet of the Dauphine. In 1756 he is still working and his vernis are paid 9000 livres, and in the same year the king orders him to decorate the cabinet of Madame Victoire. But this work it must be remembered was no longer imitations of the Japanese lac of gold on black ground. In the beginning of their career the Martins executed solely this imitation, but gradually they extended their processes and invented that rich French vernis which now bears their name, the lacquer which Voltaire refers to in his *Cambris dorés et vernis par Martin*. We must, therefore, make two parts of the work of the Martins; the first, com-

paratively limited, consists of imitations of Oriental lac; the second comprises furniture, clavecins, carriages, Sedan chairs, screens, *lambrics*, fans, boxes and coffer and all kinds of bibelots, ornamented with paintings of ornaments, flowers or subjects on a gold ground and glazed over with a fine transparent lac polish. The gold is waved or striated or speckled by some of those ingenious processes still in use amongst the Japanese, by which the pack or prepared bed on which their gold is laid is worked over while still soft. The subjects affected by the Martins are compositions painted after Lebrun, Teniers and other Flemish artists and mythological or gallant subjects in the style of Watteau, Bouches and Lancret, surrounded with foliage and rocailles in the Louis XV. style. The modern artists who produce vernis Martin, Sormani and others, affect the same kind of subjects. The effect of this decoration is exceedingly rich and caressing to the eye, but unfortunately this lacquer tends to crack after long exposure to the air.

**LIGHT NICKEL PLATING.**—Light nickel plating may, it is said, be effected by boiling. Dr. R. Kayser, according to the Bavarian *Gewerbe Zeitung*, prepares a bath of pure granulated tin, argol, and water, heats it to boiling, and then adds a small quantity of red-hot nickel oxide. A portion of the nickel, as is shown by the green color which the solution assumes—that is, above the grains of tin—is immediately dissolved. If a copper or brass article be now immersed in this solution, it almost immediately becomes covered with a silver-like coating, which consists of almost pure nickel. If a little cobalt carbonate, or cobalt tartrate, be added to the bath, a bluish tint is produced, which may be made light or darker according to the quantity added. When the article is rubbed with dry sawdust or chalk, a very brilliant polish is obtained.

**A WONDERFUL PIANO.**—Transporting pianos, and even pianos capable of printing the notes sounded on the keyboard, have been heard of before, but they do not seem to have turned out very satisfactory. A Berlin inventor—to wit, Chevalier Van Elewych—is, however, credited with having, after thirty-eight years' study and experiments, solved the problem, and manufactured an instrument which, by means of an apparatus, prints legibly and completely all that is played upon it. It is rather difficult to know whether to rejoice or to sorrow at this feat of human ingenuity. The reflection that all the trash strummed on the piano by an amateur fancying himself like Mendelssohn or Liszt, gifted with a genius for extemporizing, should find existence in a permanent stage is certainly by no means cheering.



MAHOGANY SIDEBORD, HALF OVAL FRONT.